



# Strategic Plan 2025-29



# 1. Foreword



**The past five years have seen substantial change in our world, both globally and within our own Group's community.**

The context of the pandemic, whilst now finished, still looms large over our students, staff and stakeholders, and will continue to reverberate across East Kent and more widely for many years to come.

As a further education Group, we have experienced substantial changes also, with the inclusion of our EKC Ashford College and Spring Lane campus into our organisation throughout the previous plan period, and the recent reclassification of the sector which has changed the dynamic substantially. That reclassification now means that we are highly dependent on central Government to fund capital developments, removing our ability to shape our own future moving forward, and requiring a greater dependence on national policy makers than ever before.

Whilst there was significant change over the previous plan period, we also delivered substantive success, with an Ofsted Outstanding grade that was unparalleled across the sector at the point we achieved it, multiple AoC Beacon awards, and an exceptional capital programme that resulted in significantly enhanced facilities in Ashford, Folkestone and Spring Lane.

This plan is, to coin a phrase, evolution rather than revolution and seeks to ensure we are positioned to respond to forthcoming changes such as the

devolution agenda that remains high on the Government's list of priorities. Therefore, whilst this Strategic Plan still includes entirely new priorities and directions, a number of the Goals included build upon the foundations we have developed over the past two plan periods. It is intended that there is an aspect of consolidation in this plan period, helping to strengthen the Group and develop a greater resilience than ever before.

There will be significant hurdles to achieving our aims, specifically where they are dependent on being able to secure the investment required, but as an organisation our core values have always been anchored around being ambitious for the communities we serve as well as for our own Group.

We intend to continue to explore the gaps and 'cold spots' in provision throughout East Kent and remain committed to addressing these wherever we can. And as a Group which has collaboration in our DNA, we will do this in partnership with our stakeholders such as EKC Schools Trust which we are already working closely with on the Isle of Sheppey and across our wider East Kent partnership.

We look forward to working alongside you in helping to empower our communities to develop their economic and social prosperity in a rapidly changing world.

**Lucy McLeod**  
Chief Executive Officer

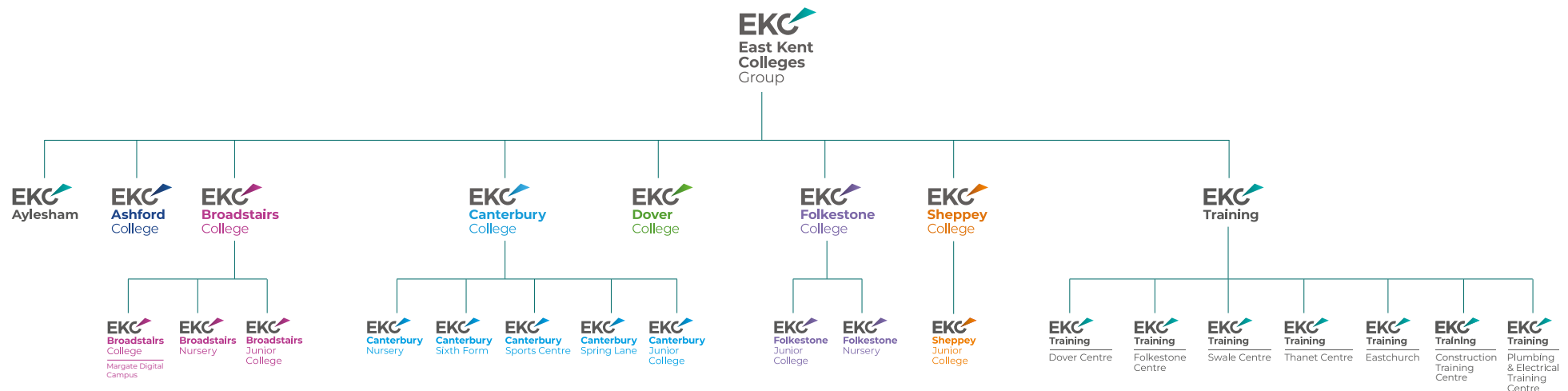


## 2. Our Group

EKC Group is one of the largest education providers in England, with 1,500 staff delivering education to over 12,000 students. Our purpose is to provide inclusive and accessible education that raises the ambitions of our students and enables them to succeed in their chosen pathway. It is also vital that the curriculum we develop and deliver is clearly linked to skills priorities at national, regional and local level. We support 2,300 businesses, working closely with them to upskill their workforce and build their talent pipelines. We do this through our family of six Colleges and EKC Training, and in collaboration with the EKC Schools Trust. This is a truly unique

partnership that enables all ages to access the highest quality educational provision, helping them to grow, flourish, and achieve their ambitions.

At the heart of who we are is community. Ensuring we empower our communities to develop their economic and social prosperity in a rapidly changing world is at the core of our collective mission. An assessment of the impact our Group has on our communities can be found at:



### MISSION

To empower our communities to develop their economic and social prosperity in a rapidly changing world

### VISION

For ambitions in life and work to be achieved through outstanding education and skills



# Our culture and values



Our culture is one of collaboration and community. We are strong believers in putting community first, with our colleges and business units working in partnership with residents, employers, charities, community groups, councils and a range of other key stakeholders to deliver learning opportunities for all and to support the transformation their locality wants and needs. Our corporate values which are espoused by our Group's staff and students alike are underpinned by the word CAREER.

**C****CREATIVITY**

adapting to change through innovation

**A****AMBITION**

empowering students to achieve their potential

**R****RESPECT**

welcoming everyone and celebrating diversity

**E****EXCELLENCE**

placing students at the heart of everything we do

**E****ENTERPRISE**

turning our ideas into reality

**R****RESILIENCE**

being determined to make a difference



# 3. Strategic Goals and Objectives

## Strategic Goal 1

Building on our existing strengths, deliver a wider range of inspirational, inclusive and accessible education provision that meets the needs of our communities





# Strategic Goal 1

			
Objective	Why do we want to do this?	What does success look like?	KPIs / Outcomes
 <p><b>1.1</b> Further develop our curriculum specialisms to create regional centres of excellence in key sectors.</p>	<p>To address the skills needs of priority sectors, we will create centres that deliver inspirational and high-quality provision that is innovative and meets sector workforce needs.</p>	<p>Established Centres of Excellence that have a strong national reputation and meet the skills needs of priority sectors, whilst providing the very best progression and career opportunities for learners.</p> <p>A distinctive and relevant curriculum offer that enables learners, including those with SEND, to achieve their ambitions and meets the needs of employers.</p> <p>An expansion of our existing investment in industry level resources and highly skilled staff teams.</p>	<p>Four Centres of Excellence established across our Colleges.* (Selected sectors will be confirmed following an assessment process).</p>
 <p><b>1.2</b> Develop an improved offer for adults that enables them to access the learning and skills they need to enhance their lives, and that meets the needs of our local communities.</p>	<p>To enhance life choices for adults, supporting their health, wellbeing, employability and progression in work.</p> <p>To support local economic prosperity by addressing skills gaps.</p>	<p>Our communities benefit from a more skilled workforce, leading to increased productivity and prosperity.</p> <p>More adult learners studying across the Group, including College-based, community and prison education provision.</p> <p>More adults progress to and achieve higher levels of education and training, further enhancing their career prospects and life chances.</p> <p>Adult learners experience better health and wellbeing due to increased confidence, social interaction, and personal development through learning.</p>	<p>85% of provision will be focused on priority sectors and identified cross-cutting themes (from a baseline of 67%).</p> <p>35% of Tailored Learning students will progress to adult funded programmes or access courses (from a baseline of 19%).</p> <p>EKC Group is above the national expected levels of adult progression using the Department for Education's 'Skills Measure'†</p>

† The Department for Education's Skills Measure shows whether the rate of progression into sustained employment and / or higher level learning for learners achieving at a provider is above, below, or at expected levels. This takes into account local contextual factors (for example deprivation and levels of unemployment).





## Objective

### 1.3

**Develop a distinctive and relevant Higher Education offer that enables learners to achieve their ambitions and meets the needs of employers.**

### 1.4

**Build on our strong partnership with EKC Schools Trust, providing technical education and progression opportunities for children and young people.**



## Why do we want to do this?

To deliver inclusive pathways and programmes that increase opportunities for individuals to access higher education and skilled employment.

To align HE pathways with industry needs, ensuring that students acquire the skills that are in high demand.

To expand the opportunities for children to experience technical education within their local community.

To match education with the talents and skills of children and young people, supporting them to remain fully engaged in their education and to make the right choices for their future careers.



## What does success look like?

A Higher Education offer is established, delivering inclusive programmes that widen participation and advance the earnings potential and life opportunities of our students.

Our programmes and partnerships, including Higher Apprenticeships, provide a highly skilled workforce for local industry.

Building on the existing strong partnerships between EKC Schools Trust's schools and our Colleges, every child has the opportunity to experience technical education and learn about future career opportunities, whilst enabling our students to demonstrate their passion for their chosen pathway.

More young people study locally on the Isle of Sheppey, enabling them to progress to careers or further learning, and make a positive contribution to their community.

Nursery provision is successfully established in the three communities where we do not currently have a presence, providing an increase in places to meet local needs, whilst enabling more of our Early Years students to secure valuable work placement and career opportunities.



## KPIs / Outcomes

Increase Higher Apprenticeships starts from 25 to 70, including one new programme per year in priority sectors. 100% of curriculum areas cocreate their offer with employers.

70% or higher of Level 4 and above students state that they were using what they learnt while studying.

95% Internal Survey and top quartile NSS student satisfaction for Quality of Teaching on My Course.

Each of our Colleges establishes an enhanced technical education programme with EKC Schools Trust schools to enrich the curriculum and student experience.

Deliver agreed partnership and progression arrangements between EKC Secondary School and Sheppey College, to contribute towards a 66% increase (171) of young people completing their 16-19 education on the Island.

Establish three further nurseries in Ashford, Dover, and Sheppey.\*





# Strategic Goal 1



## Objective

**1.5**

**Establish a broader range of accessible and inclusive provision to meet the wide range of needs of our young people.**



## Why do we want to do this?

To ensure EKC Group remains fully inclusive, we will focus on developing education and progression pathways accessible to all young people.



## What does success look like?

Building on our three existing Junior Colleges, establish one in each of our other three Colleges (Ashford, Dover, and Sheppey) to support young people who want to follow a technical pathway from the age of 14.

Mainstream and specialist SEND provision that continues to meet the dynamic changes in learner needs.

An Alternative Provision is established in communities identified as having limited opportunities for young people, particularly those not yet ready for a College environment.



## KPIs / Outcomes

Junior Colleges are successfully established at each of our six colleges.\*

No more than a 3% differential in the achievement and progression rate of SEND learners.

An Alternative Provision is established in each of the identified communities that fully meets our defined standard.



\* Following the reclassification of Further Education Colleges into the public sector and the removal of Colleges' ability to commercially borrow, the scope and scale of these new developments will be dependent on Department for Education capital funding and other funding opportunities.



# Strategic Goals and Objectives







## Strategic Goal 2

Strategic Goal 2: Ensure our learners are equipped for their next stage of life and work in a rapidly changing world





# Strategic Goal 2

			
Objective	Why do we want to do this?	What does success look like?	KPIs / Outcomes
 <p><b>2.1</b> Equip our learners with career and life critical skills that are embedded in all our courses, including digital and AI, employability, entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainability.</p>	<p>Students with limited skills in these areas have a barrier to accessing learning, achieving their potential in their future lives and careers, and making a positive impact in their local community.</p> <p>To better meet local skills needs.</p>	<p>Students will have general and sector specific skills and capabilities that will enable them to thrive in their learning programme and next steps.</p> <p>Employers provide positive feedback on the capabilities of our students in these critical skills areas, including in their work placements, apprenticeships, and progression to employment.</p>	<p>All study programmes include high quality embedded content in digital and AI, employability, entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainability that is relevant to each industry sector.</p> <p>All students have access to a digital skills toolkit and coach that enable them to benefit in learning and life.</p> <p>All students have access to opportunities to engage in community and business innovation projects to apply the specific skills and behaviours they have developed in their learning.</p>
 <p><b>2.2</b> Ensure that employers are at the heart of curriculum design, development and delivery.</p>	<p>It is crucial that employers continue to work in partnership with the Group to co-design and deliver courses. This ensures they continue to keep up with industry trends and provide the best opportunities for our students to gain industry experience and achieve their ambitions.</p>	<p>Students are provided with valuable, real-world experience, preparing them to meet the demands of their chosen career path and supporting their ambitions, including those with SEND.</p> <p>Students benefit from the most up to date knowledge and expertise from industry leading employers providing them with the knowledge, skills and cultural capital of their sector.</p>	<p>Building on our existing collaboration agreements, develop a wider range of partnerships across all industry sectors for the co-design, development and delivery of programmes.</p>





## Objective



## Why do we want to do this?



## What does success look like?



## KPIs / Outcomes



### 2.3

**Deliver a student experience that enables all learners to grow in confidence and independence, preparing them for their future lives and careers.**

To have a consistent student experience offer that engages students to build their talents, social skills, confidence in their own abilities and independence in life.

A student experience framework that enables students to:

- explore opportunities they have previously not been able to access in their lives
- thrive in learning and in their community
- grow as an individual to be confident and independent in life
- make sustainable choices that take account of their impact on the environment
- make a positive contribution to their communities and wider society
- clearly understand their potential progression routes and career pathways

Every sector will have a wider student educational experience opportunity that complements the course and raises students' aspirations for their chosen industry.



### 2.4

**Strengthen the student voice creating more opportunity for all our students to be heard and represented.**

An inconsistent student voice across all sectors is impacting the development of a relevant and engaging student experience.

Only a relatively small proportion of the student population are passionate and interested in leading the student voice locally and nationally.

Student leaders in underrepresented areas are developed in every college with comprehensive training to fulfil their role.

Students are empowered to develop and have a range of opportunities to develop new interests, explore and celebrate diversity and wider society. Students have the opportunity to feedback and initiate developments in curriculum design and delivery

Every programme of learning has a student leader that undergoes a comprehensive student leader development programme and is empowered to use their voice to help develop and improve education experiences.

Student leaders, including the Student Union, represent a range of cohorts and provide impactful change initiatives to benefit the education for all.



# Strategic Goals and Objectives



## Strategic Goal 3

Develop and deliver a range of exceptional business support and training solutions, establishing long-term partnerships with our local employers to enable them to grow and innovate



# Strategic Goal 3



## Objective

### 3.1

**Develop and deliver a well-defined and sustainable innovation offer to support our businesses.**

To use our facilities and expertise to support innovation in our local businesses, particularly SMEs. Local businesses that are supported to successfully innovate are more likely to grow and expand, creating new learning and career opportunities for our students.

### 3.2

**Develop an improved, co-ordinated and easily understood offer to business**

To ensure we create a more joined up and responsive offer to business across the Group, whilst creating more opportunities for our students to gain relevant skills and experience.  
To ensure that our offer can be easily included in wider local prospectuses to support potential large infrastructure and inward investment projects.



## Why do we want to do this?



## What does success look like?

A well-defined, scalable innovation offer that responds to the needs of local businesses.  
EKC Group is seen as an enabler of productivity and business growth through strategic advice, workforce support and innovation.  
Students have increased opportunities to be involved in projects commissioned by employers and other work-related activities.

Businesses and key stakeholders have a clear understanding of our offer, including Apprenticeships, work placements, T Level industry placements, and employee training.  
We successfully work with our key stakeholders to develop a clear offer to support potential large infrastructure projects (e.g. Lower Thames Crossing) and inward investment opportunities.



## KPIs / Outcomes

Establish three Innovation Hubs in key priority sectors that make a financial contribution from year two.  
Successful delivery of a comprehensive package of business support, including:

- Certified Innovation Training Courses
- Consultancy and Project Management
- Student and Staff Enterprise support
- Collaborative Projects
- Platform and Prototype Development

The development and delivery of courses that support skills needs that cut across all sectors, such as Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, and other digital skills.

The development of a comprehensive product portfolio that is easy for businesses to understand and access.  
Successful delivery of a microsite and other tools that enable businesses to easily navigate and understand our offer, with clear, relevant and responsive points of contact.  
Establish a baseline for employers' understanding of the Group's offer in 2025 and use this to set an appropriate target.  
Work with partners to develop local investment prospectuses, that include our education and skills offer, for at least two of our local authority areas by 2026.





# Strategic Goal 3



## Objective

### 3.3

**Strengthen and enhance co-ordinated business engagement across the Group.**



## Why do we want to do this?

To more effectively meet the needs of our businesses and avoid separate and disjointed points of contact from the Group.



## What does success look like?

Businesses find it easy to engage with the Group and can access the support they need.  
Clear and efficient communication channels between the Group and our employers, leading to increased satisfaction and loyalty.



## KPIs / Outcomes

Successful delivery of a comprehensive account management framework that streamlines employer interactions and enables the Group to better meet business needs.  
Full deployment of a Customer Relationship Management system across the Group that is effectively utilised by all relevant staff and delivers the required support to achieve our business engagement objectives.  
Establish a baseline for employer satisfaction in 2025 and use this to set an appropriate target.





# Strategic Goals and Objectives



## Strategic Goal 4

Develop and invest in our people to enable them to prosper in their roles and careers, delivering transformational education and services for our communities



# Strategic Goal 4



## Objective



## Why do we want to do this?



## What does success look like?



## KPIs / Outcomes



### 4.1

**Recruit and retain outstanding staff to deliver inspirational education and high-quality professional services.**

Attracting talented teachers and trainers is essential for delivering outstanding learning programmes that equip our students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.

Attracting skilled non-teaching staff is critical to provide exceptional services across the Group, ensuring that students and the organisation can thrive and achieve their full potential.

Expert teachers and trainers are in every curriculum department.

Expert staff across our Group that provide a consistently high standard of student support and highly professional Group services, ensuring excellence in every aspect of our operations.

75% of all vacancies recruited for have at least three high quality candidates shortlisted.

Average time to recruit for vacancies is 50 days or less.

60% of posts above our entry point are recruited through internal progression.

Maintain labour turnover at less than the national education sector average (currently 22%).



### 4.2

**Develop our staff to enable them to enhance their skills and support their career progression.**

To future-proof our workforce through succession planning and talent management, whilst providing progression opportunities for staff.

Staff have the knowledge, skills and experience to succeed in their current and future roles.

Managers are equipped with the skills and knowledge through our internal development programme, to support their teams to flourish.

Talent is identified and managed to ensure staff are supported to develop and progress, in line with their career aspirations.

Succession plans are in place for key areas of the organisation.

All staff have a meaningful development plan to help them achieve their goals.

All managers attend and complete our management development programmes.

Future leaders are identified and developed through an aspiring leaders programme.

Succession plans are in place for all leadership and key areas of the organisation.

The annual staff survey score for "There is an opportunity to progress in the organisation" increases from a baseline of 69% to 75%.





#### Objective



**4.3**  
Develop an inclusive, welcoming and thriving staff community, being recognised as a sector leader in inclusive practice and an employer of choice.



#### Why do we want to do this?

To enhance our inclusive environment where all staff can thrive and feel a strong sense of belonging. This will enable them to fully contribute to the Group's culture and values, fostering a more engaged, motivated workforce that drives our collective success and enriches the student experience.



#### What does success look like?

Fostering a team of thriving, committed staff who are supported in their wellbeing and are fully equipped to deliver the best outcomes for our communities.  
Staff feel they have a voice and are consulted on key developments within the Group.  
Additionally, the Group would be recognised as a sector leader in inclusive practice, setting a benchmark for excellence across the education sector.



#### KPIs / Outcomes

Employees that are proud to be a member of staff at EKC Group increases from a baseline of 90% to 95%.  
The annual staff survey score for "My views are sought and considered" increases from a baseline of 73% to 80%.  
EKC Group and its staff are recognised for its inclusive practices through awards and other achievements.

\* Following the reclassification of Further Education Colleges into the public sector and the removal of Colleges' ability to commercially borrow, the scope and scale of these new developments and carbon reduction outcomes will be dependent on Department for Education capital funding and other funding opportunities.



# Strategic Goals and Objectives

## Strategic Goal 5

Build on our investment in a sustainable physical and digital infrastructure, ensuring that our facilities, services and learning environments meet the needs of students and industry







## Objective

### 5.1

**Deliver the Group's property strategy to enable capital investment in projects that support Strategic Goals 1-3, student growth, condition improvement, and our sustainability objectives.**



## Why do we want to do this?

To deliver our education objectives by providing high quality teaching and learning environments.

To accommodate the needs of the communities we serve, including where there is population growth.

Ensuring that all our students benefit from consistently high quality learning environments wherever they are studying.

To embed sustainability objectives within all capital projects to meet our net zero commitments.



## What does success look like?

A range of high quality, fit for purpose learning environments that support the achievement of Strategic Goals 1-3.

Dependent on available external funding, deliver the third phase of Ashford College's expansion to meet the continued expected growth in student numbers.

Investment to improve the condition of our estate, which is prioritised where it will support the student experience and the delivery of our education objectives.

A significant reduction in our annual carbon emissions from our estate.



## KPIs / Outcomes

High quality, fit for purpose learning environments for Strategic Goal 1-3 objectives, including: Centres of Excellence, Alternative Provision, Junior Colleges, Higher Education, and Nurseries.\*

Deliver key property strategy projects on time and on budget, including:

- Margate Digital
- Sheppey College extension
- Dover Beacon
- Folkestone Ambition refurbishment
- Ashford Phase 3\*

Deliver condition improvement projects on time and on budget that eliminate poor quality space of condition C and D, linked to the Department for Education survey results (due December 2025).

Reduce purchased Kilowatt hours from 12,973,480 by 17% to 10,767,988.\*

Increase self-generated Kilowatt hours from 268,803 to 2,474,295.\*

Tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e (t)) reduced by 17% from 2,608 to 2,165.\*



# Strategic Goal 5



## Objective

### 5.2

**Deliver the Group's Digital Transformation Strategy to provide a digital environment that enables all students and staff to develop the skills and knowledge required to succeed in a fast-paced, digital and data-driven world.**



## Why do we want to do this?

To support the delivery of our education objectives by providing high quality, digitally enabled teaching and learning environments.

To provide our staff with the appropriate digital infrastructure and skills to work effectively and efficiently.

To provide our students with the appropriate digital infrastructure to enable them to achieve in their studies.



## What does success look like?

Up-to-date devices enable students to study effectively and staff to deliver outstanding teaching and services.

The digital infrastructure is updated and provides students and staff with high quality and effective connectivity and access to software and systems.

All staff are supported to develop and enhance their digital skills to improve teaching, learning, assessment or business practice.

The staff and student experience are improved and satisfaction in digital services increases.



## KPIs / Outcomes

A five-year replacement strategy is delivered to ensure that staff and student devices are up to date and meet needs.

A digital infrastructure replacement cycle is delivered to ensure that staff and students receive high quality connectivity.

Successful roll out of AI technology to support teaching, reduce workload and improve customer experience.

Staff and student surveys demonstrate measurable improvement in satisfaction.





# 4. Partnerships and civic leadership

EKC Group is a partnership driven organisation with a strong sense of civic leadership responsibility. We will continue to work closely with key stakeholders to ensure that each of our local Colleges and EKC Training meet the economic, skills and social needs of our communities. We firmly believe that it is only through working in partnership that we will be able to pursue our mission, and deliver our strategic goals and objectives. Our key stakeholders include:

- National funding bodies and policymakers;
- National organisations and networks;
- Regional and Kent-wide organisations and networks;
- District, Borough and City Councils in East Kent;
- Strategically important employers;
- Business representative groups and networks;
- Media;
- Other education providers and networks;
- Internal stakeholders;
- Local and national politicians.

Our strong partnerships will be critical in enabling us to deliver on many of the key areas in this Strategic Plan. This includes the joint delivery of major projects with our District and Borough Council partners, including Dover Beacon, Margate Digital, and the extension of EKC Sheppey College. These projects will deliver a range of high quality and industry standard facilities, which will support the transformation of these towns and provide a wealth of new and exciting opportunities for young people and adults.





# Partnerships and civic leadership

Our strong partnerships with local community groups and networks will help to ensure that every community we serve has access to aspirational education that engages all learners, and enables them to participate and progress. This will include identifying and addressing gaps in provision to meet the needs of those learners who may not yet be ready for a College environment.

Whilst our Group is focused on East Kent, it is vital that we also feed into wider policy and strategies. We are committed to working as close partners with Kent County Council and our District and Borough Councils to feed into the development and delivery of devolution policy. This includes proposals to reorganise local government and create new unitary authorities that make sense for our local communities, and provide the basis for better joined-up working that deliver more effective services, including holistic health, wellbeing and skills programmes. We will also work in partnership with other key stakeholders to achieve this, including the NHS and Jobcentre Plus.

Working collaboratively with our wide range of employers will enable us to continue to design, develop and deliver a curriculum that meets the current and future local skills priorities, and ensure we are providing the very best opportunities for our students' future careers. Our technical and vocational education is helping to meet the needs identified in the Local Skills Improvement Plan, empowering the next generation of skilled workers to boost growth across the county. We will continue to work closely with Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and our two Kent Further Education partners, MidKent College and North Kent College, to develop solutions that meet the current and future needs of the workforce, and support major infrastructure projects and inward investment, such as the Lower Thames Crossing.

As one of the largest employers in East Kent, our Group has a responsibility to act sustainably and ethically. We believe that the best way of achieving this is to embed these areas within our plans, policies and ways of working, including this new Strategic Plan. For example, this can be seen in the measurable outcomes we want to achieve against our infrastructure objectives, and is built into our objectives to provide inclusive and accessible provision for each of our local areas. We will continue to listen to the voice of students and provide them with opportunities to develop and deliver sustainable projects, and social action initiatives. We also want to support our local employers to be more sustainable, giving them access to our facilities and cutting-edge equipment to help them to test new products, and achieve more efficient ways of operating that reduce the impact on the environment. Our students will also be involved in these projects, enabling them to help develop sustainable solutions. In addition, we will continue our commitment to developing and sustaining our local network of suppliers through our 'buy local' initiatives.



